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**Figure 1**  
**ANGEL APPEARING TO ZACHARIAS**



**Figure 2**  
**TEMPLE AT JERUSALEM?**  
**CAPITALS FROM MOUTIER-SAINT-JEAN**

## ROMANESQUE CAPITALS

THE sixteen new Romanesque capitals acquired by the Fogg Museum raise at one stride its collections in this field to an enviable height. Especially the twelve capitals from Moutier-Saint-Jean are of an importance hardly equalled by any other object of mediaeval art in America. Indeed the Louvre itself possesses no comparable example of the Burgundian school, which is, perhaps, whether from the point of view of historic importance, or from that of pure aesthetic excellence, the most significant of mediaeval sculpture. We have here the twelfth century at its purest and best, a supreme example of a vital period.

Of the history of Moutier-Saint-Jean very little is known, and yet that little by singular good fortune includes the most essential facts. The abbey was situated in the département of Côte-d'Or, in the valley of the Récôme, a few miles above Semur. But little of the church, apparently, remains *in situ*; a Beaux-Arts photograph shows a thirteenth century portal, with a tympanum representing the Coronation of the Virgin, built into a modern room which seems to be used as a stable (Photo. No. 19959); two others show a Virgin of the fourteenth century, and three statues of the fifteenth century (Photos. Nos. 20701, 20702), all apparently fragments from the ancient monastery.

The most important source of information about Moutier-Saint-Jean is however the account in Dom Plancher's "Histoire générale et particulière de

Bourgogne," published by Fay at Dijon in 1737 in four great folio volumes. Dom Plancher knew the abbey before the Revolution, when it was still presumably intact. The information he gives us is therefore most precious testimony. Unfortunately he seems to have been much more interested in the later Gothic portions of the church than in the far more important twelfth century remains. He has left us (volume I, page 516) a full page engraving of the thirteenth century porch, with triple portal, in the central tympanum of which was represented the *Majestas Domini* and the apostles: he studies in great detail the iconography of the capitals of this porch. But he is silent in regard to the Romanesque capitals of the church which have now found their way into the Fogg Museum. What he does tell us of great interest is that the church was built by the abbot Bernard II, who was elected in 1109, and who died in 1133.

There can be little question that the Fogg Museum capitals come from the church. Their size and architectural forms indicate that they must have supported heavy transverse ribs. They are consequently anterior to 1133.

This date agrees well with that indicated for other Burgundian monuments. The closest relatives of the Moutier-Saint-Jean capitals are those of Saulieu; now Saulieu was consecrated in 1119. It is probable that at the time of this consecration only the now destroyed choir was completed, and that the existing capitals of the nave date from after rather than before this year. This would make them



Figure 3. ELIZABETH AND HANDMAIDEN



Figure 4. ANGEL



Figure 5. VILLAGE OF EMMAUS ?



Figure 6. SAMSON AND THE LION



Figure 7



Figure 8

CAPITALS FROM MOUTIER-SAINT-JEAN



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

CAPITALS FROM MOUTIER-SAINT-JEAN

exactly contemporary with Moutier-Saint-Jean. Autun is the next closest relative; Autun begun in 1119 was consecrated in 1132. The Moutier-Saint-Jean capitals were therefore in all probability executed in the third decade of the twelfth century.

The nine capitals decorated with pure design (eight of which are reproduced, Figures 7-14) show that combination of strength and delicacy, that supreme skill in execution which is characteristic of the best Burgundian work of the twelfth century. It is, however, the figured capitals that grip most strongly the attention.

The first of the figured capitals represents on its principal face the Angel appearing to Zacharias (Figure 1). The priest of the course of Abia is officiating at an altar covered with a cloth falling in curving folds, and terminating in a fringe. He seems to have held in one hand a censer, in the other a book, but both objects are much broken. Gabriel stands before him gravely, his arms crossed. On the face of the capital to the left is shown Elizabeth, probably conceived of as being in a building adjoining the temple, and which is perhaps indicated by the arch with triple billet moulding that surmounts the scene (Figure 3). Elizabeth is accompanied by a handmaiden, or possibly a youth, with whom she appears to be in earnest conversation. There is, so far as I know, no text either scriptural or legendary which could account for this amplification of the Annunciation to Zacharias. The fact that the church was dedicated to Saint John may in part explain why an event so important

for the life of the Baptist should have been given especial emphasis. Surprising as is this face of the capital, however, the other is much more so. We seem to be shown a sort of genre scene in which the sculptor amuses himself by imagining the adjuncts of the temple at Jerusalem (Figure 2). Such amplification of the *mise-en-scène* is not entirely unprecedented in twelfth century art; in the voussures of the portal at Le Mans for example the sculptor not content with showing us the Marriage at Cana, transports us into the kitchen where the feast was prepared, and entertains us with a most diverting representation of mediaeval cookery in all its details. So in the capital at Moutier-Saint-Jean we have perhaps merely a genre representation of the life about a mediaeval church. Thus we see the bell-ringer hard at work pulling the cord of the bell under the tower. This figure vividly calls to mind the *Milio campanarius* of the Reggio mosaic. But the other end of the rope seems to be attached not to the bell, but to the hair of a demon perched on the summit of the tower; and on the roof of the temple is seated a cowled personage. He holds in his hands an object which might be a tile. Over his left shoulder is seen a cutting hammer, which was the stock implement of the mediaeval masons. Have we here a master-builder repairing the roof of the temple? Or does this entire face of the capital have some other, and much more profound, meaning, which escapes me?

The second capital represents on its principal face, as Professor Post has recognized, the Journey





Figure 15  
JOURNEY TO EMMAUS



Figure 16  
SACRIFICES OF CAIN AND ABEL  
CAPITALS FROM MOUTIER-SAINT-JEAN

to Emmaus (Figure 15). Christ, holding the Resurrection cross (it has been nearly entirely broken away) meets the two disciples who carry pilgrims' staffs. It is not clear why one of the disciples should be represented as much shorter than the other. Above on either side hover angels of extraordinary loveliness — one of the most beautiful passages in the entire series of capitals (see also Figure 4). On the right-hand face of the capital is shown a city — a locked door, with heads of various ages and sexes peering from three windows (Figure 5). This presumably indicates either Jerusalem or the village of Emmaus.

The third capital represents the Sacrifices of Cain and Abel (Figure 16). The two protagonists are indicated by inscriptions — ABEL CUM PRIMICIIS, CAIM CUM LOLIO. Abel, who is haloed, in distinction from Cain who is not, presents a lamb; the hand of God descends towards it, and away from Cain, who offers a sheaf of wheat. The two brothers are separated by a double-headed eagle, an ancient motive of Eastern origin, which perhaps found its way into Burgundy through the medium of stuffs. The right-hand face of the capital shows Samson wrestling with the Lion (Figure 6). In later mediaeval iconography Samson is often the symbol of Force; but it is not clear that the subject here refers to the brutality of Cain.

If the capitals of Moutier-Saint-Jean are of infinitely higher quality than those of Saint-Pons, the latter are in revenge much better known. The abbey of Saint-Pons and the scattered fragments

of its sculpture were the subject of an exhaustive monograph by J. Sahuc, published at Montpellier (Société Anonyme de l'Imprimerie Générale du Midi) in 1908 and entitled "L'Art roman à Saint-Pons-de-Thomières." In this work all the capitals now at the Fogg Museum, but which at that time belonged to Mme. Marty at Saint-Pons are reproduced and described (pages 78-79, 80-81, plate H, figures 2, 3, 4; plate J, figures 1, 2; plate K, figures 3, 4, 5, 6). M. André Michel, in his well known "Histoire de l'Art" (volume I, page 630) devoted a large amount of space to Saint-Pons, and reproduced the capital representing the Feast at the House of Simon, which is now at the Fogg Museum.

Saint-Pons is situated in the département of Hérault, and lies on the southern edge of the Cévennes, north-west from Narbonne. The monastery was founded in 936 by Raimond Pons II, count of Toulouse and his wife Garsinde. The church was dedicated in 937 or 938. Little of this structure however survives in the existing church, which has been several times made over and reconstructed. In 1171 Roger Trencavel, vicomte of Béziers, having quarreled with Raimond de Dourgne, abbot of Saint-Pons, took, pillaged, and destroyed the monastery. The church however was not injured. It is probable that the capitals now in the Fogg Museum belong to a reconstruction of the cloister begun after this sack. The monastery appears to have been associated with the reform of Cluny (Bruehl, IV, 203; Bullarium, 216). In the

sixteenth century the abbey fell into decline. In 1567 the cloister was destroyed; but in 1668 it was rebuilt with the old materials. The choir of the church was destroyed in 1572, but the débris was not cleared away until 1716. At this period the orientation of the church was reversed, so that the ancient portals are now in the choir wall. The cloister, although repaired, was not kept up, and soon began to fall again into ruin. It had apparently entirely disappeared before 1785, but the ancient capitals passed into the possession of various families of the neighbourhood, where they remained until a few years ago. Two however found their way to the Museum of Toulouse, and two others to Montpellier, one to the university, the other to the archaeological museum.

In the church of Saint-Pons there remain two tympana representing one the Last Supper, the other the Crucifixion. There is also a side portal with strange sculptures of the Sun and Moon, signed by the sculptor Gillo. All this work upon the church is however much more primitive than the capitals of the cloister; it probably dates from early in the twelfth century, whereas the Fogg Museum capitals are to be placed after the sack of 1171.

Another capital of this same series has recently been acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and three others have been given to the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

The capitals of the cloister of Saint-Pons seem to have been executed slowly during a considerable

interval of time, in which the style gradually transformed itself, although an unmistakable effort is made to preserve the uniformity of design. Thus the later capitals show us Romanesque types, but really executed in the Gothic manner.

The earliest capital of the Fogg Museum may even antedate the sack of 1171. Certain draperies recall those of Gillo. On the principal face is represented the Feast at Emmaus (Figure 17). Christ in an aureole is seated between the two disciples. With His left hand He breaks a bread; with His right He blesses. The disciples are in the act of recognizing Him; their astonishment is well indicated. On one of the small faces is represented a city, Jerusalem or Emmaus (Figure 19), as in the capital of Moutier-Saint-Jean; on the opposite long face, the Journey to Emmaus (Figure 18). The disciples have staffs, but Christ is distinguished neither by a cruciform halo nor by the resurrection cross. As M. Sahuc has remarked the sculptor seems to wish to preserve His incognito. On the fourth small face of the capital is the *Noli me tangere* (Figure 20).

The second capital represents the *Majestas Domini* (Figure 21). Christ, seated on a throne, is surrounded by an aureole sustained by two angels. On the other faces are apostles, barefooted (Figure 22).

The iconography of the third capital is most unusual. Like the right-hand lintel of the outer porch at Charlieu, it represents the Sacrifice of Blood and Bread according to the Old Testament, of course



Figure 17. FEAST AT EMMAUS



Figure 18. JOURNEY TO EMMAUS



Figure 19. VILLAGE OF EMMAUS ?



Figure 20. NOLI ME TANGERE



Figure 21. MAJESTAS DOMINI



Figure 22. APOSTLES

CAPITALS FROM SAINT-PONS



Figure 23. ALTAR OF THE ANCIENT LAW



Figure 24. SACRIFICE OF BREAD



Figure 25. FEAST AT THE HOUSE OF SIMON



Figure 26. KITCHEN SCENE



Figure 27  
CHRIST IN THE HOUSE OF MARY AND MARTHA  
CAPITALS FROM SAINT-PONS



Figure 28

symbolical of the Eucharist. The subject is inspired by Deuteronomy xvi, 2. On one of the smaller faces is seen the altar of the ancient law (Figure 23); above it appear the heads of two animals waiting to be sacrificed. To the left stands the priest with the sacrificial knife; to the right a Levite with a club. The three remaining faces of the capital are occupied with the representation of the Sacrifice of Bread (Figure 24).

The last capital, the style of which in its daintiness almost suggests the fourteenth century, represents the Feast at the House of Simon (Figure 25). Christ, seated at table between an apostle and another person, engaged in pouring wine from a carafe into a cup, points at the Magdalen, who is anointing His feet. On the right side is the kitchen in which the feast is prepared (Figure 26); women are cleaning fish and pouring water into a cauldron while a pot hangs on a peg above. The remaining faces (Figures 27 and 28) probably show, as Professor Post suggests, Christ in the house of Mary and Martha (St. Luke x, 38-40). He is seated; behind Him are two disciples; Mary sits at His feet; Martha cumbered about much serving stands behind.

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